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REASON AND REVELATION (1948)

1. To clarify the issue, we replace “reason – revelation” by “philosophy – revelation.”

By the problem of reason and revelation I understand the problem of *philosophy* and revelation. “Reason” is neutral: the rights of reason ²would seem to be² recognized by believers in revelation and by unbelievers alike. We rise above the level of neutrality, or of triviality, we enter the arena of conflict, if we confront revelation with a particular *interpretation* of reason – with the view that *the* perfection of reason and *therefore the* perfection of man is philosophy. *Philosophy* is incompatible with revelation: philosophy must try to *refute* revelation, and, if not revelation, at any rate theology must try to *refute* philosophy.

2. Revelation must try to prove the absurdity of philosophy.

Speaking as a non-theologian to theologians, I shall not presume to define *revelation*. Only one point must be made. Regardless of whether revelation is understood as revelation of a *teaching* or as a *happening*, the claim of revelation becomes noticeable first through a *teaching based* on revelation. Faith in revelation necessarily issues in preaching or proclaiming the message of revelation and therefore ultimately in a teaching – if in a teaching which always falls short of its task. Those who present that teaching cannot *disregard* the claim of philosophy which is incompatible with the claim of revelation. And they cannot leave it at¹ anathem[at]izing or at forbidding

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philosophy: they have to refute its claims. This necessity creates a serious problem. If we assume on the basis of the account of the Fall that *the* alternative for man is philosophy *or* obedience to God's revelation, a refutation of philosophy would seem to be tantamount to a *proof* of the truth of revelation. But such a proof is considered by the most radical theologians as incompatible with the very idea of revelation. The response to revelation is faith, and faith is knowledge, if a particular kind of knowledge. Every attempt, not merely at *replacing* the certainty of faith by any other certainty, but even at *supporting* the certainty of faith by any other certainty, contradicts the nature of faith; every attempt of this kind amounts to substituting trust in flesh for trust in God. There cannot be any evidence in favor of revelation but the *fact* of revelation as known through faith. Yet this means that for those who do not have the experience of faith, there is *no shred of evidence* in favor of faith; the unbelieving man has *not the slightest reason* for doubting his unbelief; ³revelation is nothing but a *factum brutum*; the unbeliever³ can live in true happiness without paying the slightest attention to the claim of revelation: the unbeliever is excusable – contrary to what Paul clearly teaches. One cannot leave it then at the notion that there is no shred of evidence outside of the fact of revelation in favor of revelation. While a *direct* proof of revelation contradicts the nature of revelation, an *indirect* proof is inevitable. That indirect proof consists in the proof that the philosophic position is *inconsistent*, i.e. *absurd*. This proof that is not based on faith, does not do away with the difference between the knowledge of faith and merely human knowledge. For the alternative: "philosophy or obedience to revelation" is not complete: the third alternative is escapism or despair. The refutation of the claim of philosophy leads, not to faith, but to despair. The transformation of despondent man into a believing and comforted man is the action, not of man, but of God's grace.

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3. *What philosophy is, cannot be directly known to-day.*

It is more appropriate for me to try to explain what *philosophy* is. It seems to me that the idea of philosophy which is presupposed in present-day discussions by theologians as well as

by others, blurs the decisive features. As a consequence, the philosophic challenge to theology is underestimated. People are led to believe that all serious philosophers rejected atheism explicitly or implicitly and since all philosophic doctrines of God are obviously insufficient, the desirability, if not the fact, of revelation seems to become a foregone conclusion for every honest person. Of course, no one can help admitting that there is a philosophic atheism, but that atheism is declared to be a *modern* phenomenon, a *post-Christian* phenomenon which *therefore* presupposes Christianity and is an indirect witness to the Christian faith. Indeed a case can be made for the view that all specifically modern ideas are merely secularised versions of Biblical ideas and therefore untenable without Biblical support.

But the question is precisely whether there is no alternative to Biblical faith on the one hand, and *modern* unbelief on the other. Only if it is realized that there *is* such an alternative, will⁴ the philosophic challenge to theology be properly appreciated. The alternative which I have in mind, is exactly philosophy in its original or pre-modern meaning.

To-day, we do not have a direct access to what philosophy originally meant. Our concept of philosophy is derived from *modern* philosophy, i.e. a *derivative* form of philosophy. Modern philosophy did not start from a reactivation of the original motivation of philosophy, but it took over the idea of philosophy as an *inheritance*. What is being done by a better type of historians of philosophy to-day, is nothing other than the attempt to make good for a sin of omission perpetrated by the founders of modern philosophy. These historians try to transform a mere inheritance into a living force. Hitherto, this historical work has had little effect on the general notion of philosophy which is still derived from modern philosophy. Accordingly, it is frequently assumed, e.g., that philosophy is essentially a *system*; it is forgotten that if this were so, philosophy as love of wisdom, or *quest* for wisdom, or quest for the truth, were superfluous. Philosophy was originally not systematic in *any* sense. The idea of system presupposes, as Hegel has seen, that the philosophizing individual finds "the abstract form," i.e. a context of *concepts*, "ready made." But philosophy in its original form consists in *ascending* to the

abstract form, or to conceptual clarity, or in *acquiring* concepts. Or, to turn to a more simple example, according to the view of philosophy which to-day is generally accepted, a distinction has to be made between philosophy and science. This distinction, wholly unknown to philosophy until the later part of the 18th century, amounts, for all practical purposes, to the admission of an unscientific philosophy and of an unphilosophic science. Of these two pursuits, science enjoys naturally the highest prestige. For who can have anything but contempt for an unscientific philosophy, a thing as unworthy of esteem as justice not backed by the will to *fight* for justice. This unphilosophic science does no longer aim at what philosophy originally aimed, viz. at *the final* account of the whole. Science conceives of itself as *progressive*, i.e. as being the outcome of a progress of human thought beyond all earlier human thought and as being capable of still further progress in the future. There is an appalling disproportion between the exactness of science and the self-consciousness of science as essentially progressive as long as science is not accompanied by the effort, at least *aspiring* to exactness, to prove the *fact* of progress, to understand the conditions of progress and thus to guarantee the possibility of still further progress in the future. I.e.: modern science is necessarily accompanied by the *history* of science or the history of human thought. That history now takes actually, if silently, the place formerly occupied by philosophy. If the history of human thought is studied in the spirit of science, one arrives at the conclusion that all human thought is historically conditioned or historically determined, or that the attempt to liberate one's mind from all prejudices or from all historical determination is fantastic. Once this has become a settled conviction constantly reinforced by an ever increasing number of new observations, a final account of the whole – an account which as such would be beyond historical determination – appears to be impossible *for reasons which can be made clear to every child*. Thereafter, and we are living in this Thereafter, there exists no longer a direct access to philosophy in its original meaning as quest for *the* true and final account of the whole. Once this state has been reached, the original meaning of philosophy, the very *idea* of philosophy, is accessible only through recollection

of what philosophy meant in the *past*, i.e. through *history* of philosophy. |

4. *The original meaning of philosophy.*

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What then is the original meaning of philosophy? Philosophy is originally the quest for truth, for *the* truth – for *the* beginnings of all things: In this, philosophy is at one with myth. But the philosopher is fundamentally different from the teller, or inventor, of myths. What separates the philosopher from the mythologist, is the discovery of φύσις: the first philosopher was the discoverer of φύσις. Φύσις had to be *discovered*: man does not know without further ado that there is such a thing as nature. Cf. O.T.^I Nature was discovered when the quest for the beginnings became guided by these two fundamental distinctions:

a) the distinction between hearsay and seeing with one's own eyes – the beginnings of all things must be made manifest, or *demonstrated*, on the *basis* of what all men can see always in broad daylight or through *ascent* from the visible things.

b) the distinction between man-made things and things that are not man-made – the beginning of artificial things is man, but man is clearly not the first thing, *the* beginning of *all* things. Hence those things that are *not* man-made, lead more directly to the first things than do the artificial things. The production of artefacts is due to contrivance, to forethought. Nature was discovered when the possibility was realized that the first things may produce all other things, not by means of forethought, but by blind necessity. I say: the possibility. It was not excluded that the origin of all things is forethought, *divine* forethought. But this assertion required from now on a *demonstration*. The characteristic outcome of the

I [Noted in pencil at the bottom of the page with an asterisk:] Nature *not* totality of phenomena. The pre-philosophic equivalent of φύσις: custom or way; the permanent way = the right way; right = old, ancestral, one's own – right way necessarily implies account of ancestors – of first things; ancestors must be *gods*; variety of codes – *contradiction* –; *quest* for the right code by right account of first things – how to *proceed*: a) ἀκοη – ὄψις (→ man is the measure of all things) – examination of all alleged superhuman knowledge in the light of *human* knowledge – *highest* superhuman knowledge is τέχνη; b) τέχνη – φύσις.

discovery of nature is the demand for rigorous demonstration of the existence of divine beings, for a demonstration which starts from the analysis of phenomena manifest to everyone. Since no demonstration can *presuppose* the demonstrandum⁵, philosophy is *radically* atheistic. The difference between Plato and a materialist like Democritus fades into insignificance if compared with the difference between¹ Plato and any doctrine based on religious experience. Plato's and Aristotle's attempts to demonstrate the existence of God far from proving the religious character of their teachings, actually disprove it. I

3 recto

This state of things is obscured by the *language* of Plato and of many other pre-modern philosophers. The *principle* underlying this particular kind of *speaking* has never been properly explained. Permit me therefore to say a few words about it.

Philosophy as the quest for the true beginnings of all things is the attempt to replace *opinions* about these beginnings by genuine *knowledge*, or *science*, of them. Now, it is by no means certain that this is a *legitimate* pursuit. Not only was there a popular prejudice against the attempt at prying⁶ into the secrets of the gods, but strong reasons suggested the view that opinion, and not knowledge, is the very element of human or social or political life. If opinion is the element of political life, philosophy which questions opinions as such, dissolves the very element of social life: philosophy is essentially subversive (corrupting the young). From the point of view of philosophy, this is no objection to philosophy, since quest for the truth is infinitely more important than political life: philosophizing is learning to die. Still, the philosopher has to meet the legitimate claims of society or to shoulder his own responsibility as a citizen. He does this by refraining from publicly teaching what he considers *the* truth in so far as the truth could become dangerous to society. He hides his true teaching behind a socially useful exoteric teaching.

This view of the relation of philosophy to life, i.e. to society, presupposes that philosophy is essentially the preserve of the very few individuals who are by nature fit for philosophy. The radical distinction between the wise and the vulgar is essential to the original concept of philosophy. The idea that philosophy as such could become the element of human life

is wholly alien to all pre-modern thought. Plato demands that the philosophers should become kings; he does *not* demand that philosophy should become the ruler: in his perfect polity, only 2 or 3 individuals have any access whatever to philosophy; the large majority is guided by noble lies.¹¹ The⁷ quest for knowledge implies that in all cases where sufficient evidence is lacking, assent must be withheld or judgment must be suspended. Now, it is impossible to withhold assent or to suspend judgment in matters of extreme urgency which require immediate decision: one cannot suspend judgment in matters of life and death. The philosophic enterprise that stands or falls by the possibility of suspense of judgment, requires therefore that all matters of life and death be settled *in advance*. All matters of life and death can be reduced to the question of how one ought to live. The philosophic enterprise presupposes that the question of how one ought to live be settled in advance. It is settled by the pre-philosophic proof of the thesis that the right way of life, the one thing needful, is the life devoted to philosophy and to nothing else. The pre-philosophic proof is later on confirmed, within philosophy, by an analysis of human nature. However this may be, according to its original meaning, philosophy is *the* right way of life, *the* happiness of man. All other human pursuits are accordingly considered fundamentally defective, or forms of human misery, however splendid. ¹The moral life as moral life is *not* the philosophic life: for the philosopher, morality is nothing but the condition or the by-product of philosophizing, and not something valuable in itself. Philosophy is not only trans-social and trans-religious, but trans-moral as well.¹ Philosophy asserts that man has ultimately no choice but that between philosophy and despair disguised by delusion: only through philosophy is man enabled to look reality in its stern face without losing his humanity. The claim of philosophy is no less radical than that raised on behalf of revelation.

Philosophy stands or falls by the possibility of suspense of judgment regarding the most fundamental questions. That is to say, philosophy is as such sceptical: in the original meaning

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11 [Noted in pencil between the lines:] Idea of the enlightenment implied incurrent notion of philosophy: *harmony* between philosophy and society.

of the term. σκεψις means *looking* at things, *considering* things. Philosophy is concerned with understanding reality in all its complexity. Its complexity may preclude demonstrative answers to the fundamental questions: the arguments in favor of the various incompatible answers may be inconclusive. This would not make the philosophic enterprise futile: for the philosopher, full understanding of a *problem* is infinitely more important than any mere answer. What counts from the philosophic, i.e. the theoretical, point of view, is the articulation of the *subject matter* as an articulation supplied by the argument in favor of two contradictory answers rather than the answers themselves. Philosophy in its original sense is disputative rather than decisive. Disputation is possible only for people who are not concerned with decisions, who are not in a rush, for whom nothing is urgent except disputation. The anarchy of the systems, the pudenda varietas philosophorum is no objection whatever to philosophy.

When the philosophers say that the only possible happiness consists in philosophizing, they do not mean that philosophy can *guarantee* human happiness; for they know that man is not the master of his fate: εὐημερία, sunshine in the shape of food, shelter, health, freedom and friendship – a sunshine that is not *produced* by philosophy, is *required* for philosophizing and hence happiness, although it does not *constitute* happiness. In religious language: σὺν θεῷ = ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. |

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5. The alternative to philosophy is revelation – philosophy must try to prove that revelation is impossible.⁸

The legitimacy of philosophy does not seem to be a serious problem for the philosopher as long as he is confronted only with the pagan myths and laws. For those myths and laws essentially antedate the awareness of the problem posed by the contradictions between the various divine laws, i.e. the problem whose realisation immediately precedes the emergence of philosophy. The situation of philosophy becomes fundamentally changed as soon as philosophy is confronted with the *Bible*. For the Bible claims to present a solution to the very problem which gave rise to philosophy, and the Biblical solution is diametrically opposed to the philosophic solution. The

Bible questions the view that philosophy is the only alternative to myth; according to the¹ Bible, the alternative to myth is the revelation of the living God. The Biblical account of the first things, especially the account of what happened in the period from the creation of heaven and earth to Abraham's acts of absolute obedience, can best be understood within the present context, as an attempt to explain why one particular possible code can be the only divine code that ever was and ever will be. The same account rejects as illegitimate the possibility which came to its maturity in Greek philosophy: the possibility that man can find his happiness, or his peace, by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. What to the classical philosophers appeared as the perfection of man's nature, is described by the Bible as the product of man's disobedience to his Creator. When the classical philosophers conceive of man's desire to know as his highest natural desire, the Bible protests by asserting that this desire is a temptation. To the philosophic view that man's happiness consists in free investigation or insight, the Bible opposes the view that man's happiness consists in obedience to God. The Bible thus offers the only challenge to the claim of philosophy which can reasonably be made. One cannot seriously question the claim of philosophy in the name, e.g., of politics or of poetry. To say nothing of other considerations, man's ultimate aim is what is really good and not what merely *seems* to be good, and only through *knowledge* of the good is he enabled to find the good. But this is indeed the question: whether men can acquire the knowledge of the good, without which they cannot guide their lives individually and collectively, by the unaided efforts of their reason, or whether they are dependent for that knowledge | on divine revelation. Only through the Bible is philosophy, or the quest for knowledge, challenged by *knowledge*, viz. by knowledge revealed by the omniscient God, or by knowledge identical with the self-communication of God. No alternative is more fundamental than the alternative: human guidance or divine guidance. *Tertium non datur*. The alternative between philosophy and revelation cannot be evaded by any harmonization or "synthesis." For each of the two antagonists proclaims something as the one thing needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful

proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite to that proclaimed by philosophy. In every attempt at harmonization, in every synthesis however impressive⁹, one of the two opposed elements is sacrificed, more or less subtly, but in any event surely, to the other: philosophy which means to be the queen, must be made the handmaid of revelation or *vice versa*. If it is confronted with the claim of revelation, and only if it is confronted with the claim of revelation, philosophy as a radically free pursuit becomes radically questionable. Confronted with the claim of revelation, the philosopher is therefore compelled to *refute* that claim. More than that: he must prove the *impossibility* of revelation. For if revelation is *possible*, it is possible that the philosophic enterprise is fundamentally wrong. |

4a recto

6. *Philosophy cannot refute revelation.*

You will not expect me to give a comprehensive and detailed appraisal of the philosophic critique of revelation. I shall set forth briefly the chief lessons to be learned from a critical examination of *Spinoza's* critique of revelation. I choose Spinoza because his is the most *elaborate* critique of revelation.

Spinoza rejects revelation because of its *imaginative* character. Since it is the imagination, and not the intellect, which is the vehicle of revelation, revelation cannot supply the truth. The Biblical facts to which Spinoza refers, doubtless prove that imagination *cooperates* in the act of revelation, but they do not disprove¹⁰ the possibility that in that act imagination may be in the *service* of genuine superhuman illumination. He disposes of this possibility, in other words, he proves that divine revelation is nothing but human imagination by showing that the decisive features of revelation are identical with those of human imagination pure and simple. Imagination is essentially uncertain: we can never be certain as to whether what we imagine is actually taking place, or will take place, or not. Now, revelation is also uncertain as is shown by the fact that signs or miracles are required in order to establish the fact of revelation which without these signs and miracles would be absolutely uncertain. Secondly, imagination as such does not disclose the truth. Now, revelation as such does not disclose the truth. This is shown by the contradictions in the

Bible, i.e. by the contradictions of statements which are all allegedly based on revelation. Divine revelation is then nothing but human imagination. This is confirmed by the kinship between Biblical revelation and pagan divination. Traditional theology explains the difference between genuine revelation and pagan divination by tracing the former to God and the latter to demons or to the devil. Accordingly, belief in revelation would imply acceptance of belief in demons or in the devil. The whole fabric of the teaching based on revelation stands or falls by the acceptance of these and similar superstitious notions.

The deficiencies of this argument are obvious. It is based throughout on rigid and stupid limitation to that literal sense of every passage which is equally accessible to the believer and unbeliever. Spinoza does not consider the fundamental difference between carnal and spiritual understanding of the Bible. If his argument is to be of any significance, it must comprise a more radical consideration. Spinoza says that revelation requires confirmation by miracles; this again may be questioned. But he ¹¹is on safe ground when he asserts¹¹ that revelation in the Biblical sense is itself a miracle. His critique of miracles is the core of his critique of revelation.

A miracle is a supra-natural event. In order to be certain that a given event *is* supra-natural, and not e.g. a natural delusion of the imagination, one would have to know that it *cannot* be natural. I.e.: one would have to know the *limits* of the power of nature. This would require that we have a *complete* knowledge of nature, or that natural science is *completed*. This condition is not fulfilled and cannot be fulfilled. Accordingly, if we are confronted with an event that we cannot explain naturally, we can merely say that the event has not *yet* been explained, that it has not been explained *hitherto*. Miracles can never be *known* to be miracles.

4a verso

This argument is obviously defective. It presupposes that *everything* would be possible for nature, and Spinoza himself is forced to admit that there are things which are impossible by nature. The crucial example is resurrection from the dead. Spinoza disposes of the difficulty by raising this question: *how* do we know of these events which are impossible by nature? We know them, not from seeing with our own eyes, but from

reports. Who reported them? Trained scientific observers who looked at the facts in question dispassionately or people without any scientific training and attitude? Obviously people of the second type. Is it an accident that miracles do not happen in societies quickened by the spirit of science? The assertion of miracles is essentially relative to the pre-scientific stage of mankind. Divine revelation is human imagination as it can be active only in the pre-scientific stage. Divine revelation is identical with the prejudice of an ancient nation.

Spinoza derives further confirmation of his view from the results of his¹² criticism of the Bible. If Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, the Mosaic miracles are reported, not only by untrained observers, but by people of a much later age who knew of the happenings in question only through the medium of oral tradition, i.e. of legends.

The whole argument tends to show that the belief in revelation essentially belongs to a pre-scientific, or mythical, mind. No one can deny that there is an element of truth in Spinoza's assertion. But this element of truth is inconclusive. For we are justified in retorting that man is more capable of dimly *divining* the truth of revelation before he has cut¹³ himself loose from the roots of his existence by limiting himself to the scientific approach than after that. That the pre-scientific horizon is more favorable to belief in revelation than is the scientific horizon, does not yet prove that revelation is absolutely bound up with a mythical horizon.

Spinoza's reasoning remains defective as long as it is not supplemented by an account of the *motivation* of the alleged revelation in terms of the unbelieving reason. For Spinoza, belief in revelation is one form of *superstition*. Superstition is the way of acting and thinking in which man's pre-philosophic life protects itself against its breakdown in despair. The pre-philosophic life is the life swayed by the imagination and the emotions; in that life, man attaches himself with all his heart to finite and perishable things; their actual or foreseen loss drives him to despair of his own power to secure his happiness; he is unable to look reality in its face, to recognize with equanimity the utter insignificance of his fate and of his more cherished objects; he craves comfort; he demands passionately that his fate be of cosmic significance, and his unchecked imagination

obeys the demands of his desires by producing the required images.

For the time being, we limit ourselves to noting that Spinoza completely disregards what the Bible and theology teach regarding the specifically religious sentiments. When speaking of the crucial importance of fear e.g., he does not say a word about the difference between servile fear and filial fear. He seems to discredit himself completely by saying that he does not understand the Bible.

The best one could say about his kind of argument is that it drives home how unevident or uncertain revelation is without previous *faith* in revelation. But since this is admitted by theology, an extensive¹ argument which suffices for protecting unbelief against the demands of revelation seems to be almost insipid. In other words, even if the unbeliever could explain satisfactorily how belief in revelation *could* develop as a delusion, he would not have proved that revelation is *impossible*. Indeed, all philosophic questioning of the *demonstrability* of revelation becomes relevant only if it transforms itself into a demonstration of the *impossibility* of revelation, or of miracles.

To prove that revelation or miracles are impossible, means to prove that they are incompatible with the nature of God as the most perfect being. All proofs of this kind presuppose that there is a natural theology. Hence to-day, when the possibility of natural theology is generally denied, a refutation of the belief in revelation is not even imaginable. On the other hand, however, a *hypothetical* natural theology, a theology arguing for the mere *notion* of a most perfect being, would suffice. For it is hard to deny for anyone that, if there is a God, he must be absolutely perfect. The purely philosophic doctrine of God, i.e. the only theology which is unequivocally *natural* theology, was based on the analogy of the wise man: the most perfect being as known from experience, the wise man, gives us the only clue regarding the most perfect being simply. E.g., a wise man would pity the fools rather than wax indignant about their criminal or monstrous actions; he would be kind to everyone, he would not care particularly for anyone except for his friends, i.e. those who are actually or potentially wise. Accordingly, God cannot be conceived to condemn men¹ to

5 verso

eternal damnation. He cannot even be conceived as exercising individual providence. He cannot be conceived as *loving* men, i.e. beings who are infinitely inferior to him in wisdom.¹ But at this point a most serious difficulty arises for natural theology.¹ A God¹⁴ who is infinitely superior to man in wisdom, may be said to be *inscrutable*: He is *mysterious*. All the difficulties against which natural theology seemed to protect men, come in again: a mysterious God may well be the God of revelation. There is therefore only one way of disposing of the possibility of revelation or miracles: one must prove that God is in no way mysterious, or that we have adequate knowledge of the essence of God. This step was taken by Spinoza. His whole argument stands or falls by his denial of the legitimacy of any analogical knowledge of God: any knowledge of God that we can have, must be as clear and as distinct as that which we can have of the triangle e.g.

The question is how he secured this fundamental dogma. The usual answer is that he bases his doctrine on an intuitive knowledge of the idea of God. But it can be shown that Spinoza's intuitive knowledge is, not the beginning, but the end of his philosophy, or, in other words, that Spinoza's intuitive knowledge is knowledge, not of God, but of nature as *distinguished* from God. Spinoza arrives at his doctrine of God by freely forming a clear, distinct idea of God as¹⁵ the fully intelligible cause of all things: his methodical demand for clear, distinct knowledge, and no proof of any kind, disposes of the mysteriousness of God. What one might *call* a proof is supplied by the fact that the clear and distinct idea of God leads to a clear and distinct idea of all things or of the whole, whereas every other idea of God leads to a confused account, e.g. to the account given in the Bible. We may say that Spinoza's theology is a purely hypothetical doctrine which could become more than a hypothesis only if it actually led to a clear and distinct account of the whole. But it can never lead to that result: it can't lead to an account of the *whole* because it arbitrarily excludes those *aspects* of the whole which can't be understood clearly, distinctly.

The limitations of Spinoza's teaching are of general significance for the following reason: that teaching presents the most comprehensive, or the most ambitious, program of what

modern science could possibly be. To realize that Spinoza has failed to refute revelation means therefore to realize that modern science cannot have refuted revelation. Modern science is much more modest in its claims than Spinoza's philosophy, because it has divorced itself from natural theology; hence no objection whatever to the teaching of revelation can be based on modern science. To mention only one example: it is sometimes asserted that the Biblical account of the creation of the world has been refuted by modern geology, paleontology etc. But: all scientific accounts *presuppose* the impossibility of miracles; presupposing this, they prove that the age of the earth, or of life on the earth etc. is millions of years; but what natural processes could achieve only in such periods, could be done in a moment by God miraculously.

6 recto

To conclude: philosophy may succeed in proving the impossibility of demonstrating the fact of revelation to unbelievers; it may thus succeed in defending the unbelieving position; but this is absolutely irrelevant seeing that revelation is *meant* to be accessible only to faith, or on the *basis* of faith. The *experiential* knowledge of the *fact* of revelation remains absolutely unshaken.

7. The impression of a refutation of revelation by philosophy is created by the influence of philosophic critique on modern theology: this seems to show that the radical position of revelation is possible only in mythical horizons.

We could leave it at that but for the fact that modern theology has abandoned many positions of traditional theology under the influence of the philosophic and scientific attack on revelation. This fact seems to show that the belief in revelation is not as unassailable as it would appear on the basis of the general consideration that I have sketched. The modern theologians claim of course that by abandoning certain traditional positions they bring out the pure and central meaning of revelation more clearly than traditional theology has done. They claim that what they have abandoned are merely peripheral elements of theology and that they limit themselves to the central or essential theological teaching. But the question arises whether this distinction is tenable, i.e. whether the peripheral

elements are not necessary consequences, or implications, of the central thesis – and therefore whether modern theology which abandons the peripheral teaching, is consistent. The apparent inconsistency of modern theology has led Nietzsche among others to hurl against modern theology the charge that it lacks intellectual honesty.

Many present-day theologians subscribe without hesitation to Spinoza's thesis that the Bible is not everywhere truthful and divine. They reject therefore the belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and in the historical authenticity of the Biblical records. They reject especially the belief in miracles. They admit that the Bible abounds with mythical notions. They would say that in revealing himself to earlier generations God allowed them to understand this revelation within their mythical horizon because that horizon does not prevent at all the faithful or pious understanding of revelation. The change from the mythical world-view of the past to the scientific world-view of the modern age is completely indifferent as regards the intention of revelation. But since the mythical outlook has become discredited, one does the greatest disservice to faith by keeping the message of revelation within the mythical shell in which the record of early revelation has been transmitted to us.¹⁶

6 verso

Modern theology stands or falls by the distinction between the central or true and peripheral or mythical elements of the Bible. The Biblical basis, or point d'appui, for this distinction is the distinction between the spiritual and the carnal, or between God and flesh. Blessed is the man who puts his trust in God, cursed is the man who¹ puts his trust in flesh. Revelation is revelation of God Himself as the Father, Judge and Redeemer – and nothing else. The response to revelation is faith in God Himself – and in nothing else. But man is always tempted to put his trust, not in God, but in flesh. He substitutes worship of his own works, or idols, for the worship of God. He substitutes faith in something tangible, in something which he can control by his sense-perception, reason or action, for pure faith which has no support outside of the direct self-communication of God. Hence he tries to secure belief in God by belief in facts such as traditions or books or miracles. This has happened in traditional theology and this

has been corrected radically in modern theology. The true understanding of faith demands that a radical distinction be made between theology which is nothing but soteriology and true knowledge simply which is nothing but knowledge of the world, or cosmology. Natural theology, which is neither soteriology nor cosmology, must be rejected. The idea that the Bible contains anything relevant to faith that can be contradicted or confirmed by science, must be dismissed as absurd. Faith does not presuppose any definite view of the world as preferable to any other. It does not require any knowledge of facts which are not an integral part of the experiential-existential knowledge of God as the Redeemer. Revelation and faith "are," i.e. they are meaningful, only in and for decision, whereas facts as facts are independent of any decision. The very *manner of being* of revelation and faith is therefore fundamentally different from the manner of being of any fact, or of the world as world. There cannot be any conflict between revelation and knowledge of facts because revelation does not say anything about facts except that they are worldly or fleshly. All knowledge that is equally accessible to the believer and unbeliever, is absolutely irrelevant to the assertions of faith, and therefore science¹⁷ is perfectly free: the notion that philosophy or science ought¹⁸ [to] be the handmaid of theology, is based on a radical misunderstanding.

It seems to me that this kind of theology identifies the genuinely Biblical distinction between the spirit and the flesh with apparently similar, but actually entirely different distinctions that originate in modern philosophy: the distinction between mind and nature, between history and nature, between the existential and the merely real (i.e. between the being of responsible and responsive beings and the being of facts or things or affairs). Using the distinction between history and nature, a modern theologian has said that faith in revelation requires the truth of certain *historical* facts and that therefore a conflict between historical criticism and Biblical faith is at least possible, whereas faith in revelation implies no assertion regarding *nature*, and therefore no conflict between science and Biblical faith is possible.

7 recto

The solution suggested by many present-day theologians is apt to lead to the consequence that the assertions of faith

have a purely *inner* meaning, that the truth ascribed to them is a purely emotional and moral truth, and not truth simply. There exists therefore the danger that only the intrinsic *value* of the experience of faith distinguishes that experience from any hallucination or delusion. However this may be, the legitimate distinction between the spirit and the flesh, or between God and the world, does not justify the distinction between the central and the peripheral – at least as that distinction is frequently practised to-day. What I am driving at is this: while faith is not *of* the world, it necessarily issues, not merely in actions *in* the world, but in assertions *about* the world. Faith implies the assertion that the world is *created*. In consequence of the distinction between God and the world, Gogarten has tried to limit¹⁹ the thesis of creation to the creation of *man*:²⁰ the thesis of²⁰ creation does not say anything about extra-human beings. This is an obvious absurdity. He also has asserted that God speaks to man only through other men, especially through the preaching of the Gospel. But certainly the OT prophecies contain many cases in which God spoke to human beings directly. Bultmann has denied that the resurrection, as distinguished from the crucifixion, can be understood as a phenomenon in the world, as an event which took place at a given moment in the past. He does not deny of course that the crucifixion was a phenomenon in the world. Considering the connection between crucifixion and resurrection, Bultmann's distinction is unconvincing and is obviously due to his unwillingness to assert an unambiguous miracle. The fact that the cross is visible to everyone, whereas resurrection is only to the eyes of faith, does not do away with the fact that to the eyes of faith resurrection is visible also as an event in the past, and not merely as belonging to the eschatological Now.

There cannot be faith in God that is not faith in²¹ our being *absolutely* in the hands of God, and this means that is not faith in God's *omnipotence*, and therefore in the possibility of *miracles*. It is true that miracles cannot be the *basis* of genuine faith; but it is quite another thing to say that genuine faith does not *issue* in belief in miracles, or that it is incompatible with belief in miracles. But if the admission of the possibility of miracles is of the essence of faith, there is no reason whatever for making

an arbitrary distinction between [what] one is tempted to call intelligible miracles (especially the resurrection) and unintelligible miracles (the sun stands still in the vale of Ajalon). If we are truly convinced of our utter insufficiency and of God's hiddenness, we will prefer humbly to confess that a given Biblical account does not touch us, or does not edify us, rather than to say that the account in question can be rejected as untrue, or as a mythical residue.

7 verso

But modern theology becomes inconsistent not only by making an arbitrary distinction between the miracles which it admits, and those which it rejects; it also obscures the meaning of miracles as such. According to the traditional view, miracles are supranatural actions of God, or actions that interfere with, or interrupt, the natural order. Brunner^{III} e.g. rejects this view. He explains the miracles by employing the analogy of how life uses inanimate matter: the life processes do not interfere with the processes of inanimate matter, or put them out of action, but use them for a purpose alien to inanimate matter. Analogously, revelation "does not break into the sphere of human existence in such a way that it either pushes the human element aside or puts it out of action; but it enters by using the human in its service. Jesus Christ is a human being, 'born of a woman' etc. He is 'true man', as the dogma says." (303)¹ In Christ, the divine and the human interpenetrate: the human is not removed. (304)¹ Statements such as these seem to evade the real issue. Jesus is born, not simply of a woman, but of a virgin; above all, he is not begotten by a human father. If this is not an interruption of the natural order, I do not know what it is. If man is essentially, as Aristotle asserts, generated by man, Jesus as the Christ could not be a true man. The dogma stands or falls therefore by the fact that a being can be a human being without being begotten by human parents. The Scriptural proof of this possibility is

III [Emil Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft. Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1941). In the following, Strauss cites Olive Wyon's translation *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946). The passages that Strauss cites or to which he refers are found in the original German edition on pp. 256, 276, 277, 280, 299, 300, 323, 329, 419, 420.]

Adam. And the parallel between Adam and Christ is basic for Christian theology also in other respects.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the theology of Brunner because Brunner is ²²unusually conservative and sober.²² To mention only one example: Brunner rejects Kierkegaard's thesis according to which the Christian faith requires not more than the Apostolic reports that they believed that in that and that year God showed himself in the form of a servant, that he lived, taught and died. Brunner soberly admits that "the credibility of the Gospel narrative in its main features is the necessary foundation of real Christian faith." Yet even Brunner abandons²³ essential theological positions. His principle is that "the Scriptures are the word of God, because, and in so far as, they give us Christ," i.e. that the essential teaching of the Bible is soteriological, not cosmological, and²⁴ he rejects therefore without any misgivings all cosmological theses of the Bible. He admits that the Christian faith "does contain certain historical statements." But he obviously thinks that no historical assertions, essential to faith, have cosmological implications. While insisting most strongly on the historicity of the life of Jesus and of the resurrection, he rejects the historicity of Adam and of the whole Biblical account of the origins of mankind. But does not¹ the Biblical eschatology stand in strict correspondence to Biblical *poetology*, or account of the beginnings? Just as the eschatology of unbelief (the notion that human life will one day perish from the earth without leaving any traces and without Last Judgment) corresponds to the poetology of unbelief (the evolutionism of modern science). If one accepts evolution, does one not admit that man was not created perfect? are then man's greatest failings not due to the imperfect form in which human beings made their first appearance on earth? is man then not excusable – contrary to Paul's assertion: how could early man *know* God's law if he was not created perfect and dwelling in Eden, but poorly equipped mentally and materially? are his polytheism, his idolatry, his moral monstrosities not necessary errors as distinguished from *sin*? But, one might object, regardless of when²⁵ primitive man *became* a real human being: *in that moment* he had the choice between obedience and sin: *in that moment*, however frequently repeated, the fall took place and

is taking place. But what shall we say²⁶ of the *inheritance* of *excusable ignorance* with which real man starts his career, if the evolutionary account is right – i.e. if man was not really created, but “cast on this globe” and owes all his humanity to his revolutionary efforts? I fail to see how one can avoid the dilemma: either a perfect beginning followed by sin, or an imperfect beginning and hence *no* original sin. By denying the historicity of the fall, Brunner repeats the typical mistake for which he upbraids so severely the idealistic theologians in regard to incarnation and resurrection: he replaces a unique fact by an external concept or symbol.

Observations of this kind may be fatal to modern theology; they are ultimately of no consequence whatever. The inconsistency of modern theology does not improve in the least the position of philosophy. For even if the philosopher would have succeeded in tearing to pieces every *theology*, he would not have advanced a single step in his attempt to refute *revelation*. |

8. *Revelation cannot refute philosophy.*

8 verso

Let us now look at the other side of the picture. Let us see how philosophy fares if it is attacked by the adherent of revelation. I have said that the theologian is compelled to refute philosophy. For if he fails to do that, the philosopher can say that there is no shred of evidence against the view that the right way of life is the philosophic life: revelation is nothing but a *factum brutum*, and in addition an uncertain one. Our²⁷ first impression is that all theological arguments directed against philosophy are defective, because they are circular: they are conclusive only on the *basis* of faith.

Take Pascal's famous argument of the misery of man without God, i.e. without the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, an argument which is meant to be conclusive “*par nature*.” This argument does not in any way refute Plato's thesis that the philosopher, as exemplified by Socrates in particular, lives on the islands of the blessed. If Pascal would say that Plato did not have Pascal's Christian experience, Plato could answer with equal right that Pascal obviously did not have Plato's experience of philosophic serenity. Pascal might answer that all

philosophers underrate the power of evil, that they are superficial or optimistic. He might refer to the manner in which Lucretius opens his poem devoted to the exposition of Epicurean philosophy by praising the beneficent power of earthly love. But Lucretius could answer that this edifying prayer is only the beginning: the poem ends with the description of a most terrible plague: philosophic equanimity is beyond the conflict between optimism and pessimism.

Yet, the theologian would continue, evil is not primarily physical evil, but *moral* evil. The philosophers are blind to the fact, and the power, of *sin*. "Philosophic ethics . . . knows less of (moral) evil than the man in the street" (Brunner 327). But for this blindness, the philosophers could never have elaborated, and used, their natural theology which is based on the analogy of the wise man. The philosopher who¹ complacently asserts that God could not visit men with eternal punishment, because he, the philosopher, would never take sins of less wise beings as seriously, merely shows by this argument his callousness, or at best he reveals his dim notion that he would be lost, if God were to take sins seriously.

g recto

To this the philosopher would answer by questioning the decisive and ultimate significance of *moral* criteria. All theological attacks on the laxity of all philosophic morality could²⁸ be rebutted by the demand for a demonstration that *the* cosmic principle, or *the* first cause, is in any way concerned with morality. | No evidence supporting this view has ever been advanced: The man in the street is no authority: for is not theology the ultimate source of what he thinks and even feels? In other words, the philosopher would say that sin presupposes a moral *law*, and he would deny that there *is* a moral law. He would deny what Luther e.g. considered an indubitable fact, viz. that every human being experiences something of the reality of God who confronts him in the conscience which judges him according to the moral law. He would refer to what Aristotle says on αἰδώς (sense of shame): that it befits only young people, mature people simply must not do anything of which they would be ashamed. And as regards the intentions (≠ actions), the βουλευσεις are ἀδελφοί. There is no "synderesis" in Aristotle. ¹The open secret of the Philebus: the highest good: θεωρία plus ἡδονή.¹

The theologian: but it is inconsistent of the philosopher not to admit the strictest moral demands; for philosophy claims to be love of *truth*, and every relaxation of morality amounts to admitting the right of self-assertion or self-seeking or eudemonism which is incompatible with the radical self-denial that is implied in every real quest for truth. Philosophy is inconsistent because it would *require* a rebirth, a regeneration, but excludes it.

The philosopher: denies that human self-assertion and love of truth are incompatible. For we have a *selfish need* for truth. We *need* the eternal, the *true* eternal (Plato's doctrine of *ἔρως*). The kinship between φιλοσοφία and φιλοτιμία: *lasting* fame possible only through knowledge of the *truth*. The most far-sighted selfishness transforms itself into, nay, reveals itself as, perfect unselfishness.

The theologian: philosophy is self-deification; philosophy has its root in *pride*.

The philosopher: if we understand by God the most perfect being that is a *person*, there are no gods but the philosophers (Sophist²⁹ in princ: θεος τις ἐλεγκτικός). Poor gods? Indeed, measured by imaginary standards. – As to “pride,” who is more proud, he who says that *his* personal fate is of concern to *the* cause of the universe, or he who humbly admits that his fate is of no concern whatever to anyone but to himself and his few friends.

The theologian: the philosophic understanding of man is *superficial*; they have not fathomed the depths of man, his despair, what is hidden in his craving for distraction and in that mood of boredom which | reveals more³⁰ of man's reality than all his rational activities.

9 verso

The philosopher: these and similar phenomena reveal indeed the problematic character of all ordinary human pursuits of happiness which are not the pursuit of the happiness of contemplation. The philosopher as philosopher never craves distraction (although he needs relaxation from time to time), and he is never bored. Theological psychology is such a psychology of *non-philosophic man*, of the *vulgar*, as is not guided by the understanding of the natural aim of man which is contemplation. If the philosophers do not stress certain most “interesting” aspects of men, they are guided by a most noble

pedagogic intention: it is better for men to be reminded of what is noble and reasonable in them than to be depressed by moving and effeminating pictures of the seamy side of life.

Philosophy cannot explain³¹ revelation – ?

Perhaps the most impressive theological argument is taken from the insufficiency of the philosophic *explanation* of the belief in revelation. Philosophy *must* interpret revelation as a *myth*. I.e. it must overlook the essential *difference* between myth and revelation.

<i>Myth</i>		<i>Revelation</i>
Polytheism	–	One omnipotent God
Gods controlled by impersonal fate	–	the <i>actions</i> of God
recurrent phenomena	–	absolutely unique, unrepeatable events – <i>decision</i> , History
no distinct relation to historical events	–	essential relation to historical events (OT history; “Crucified under Pontius Pilatus”)

Brunner 259: “In *all* forms of religion, in addition to fear, there is reverence; as well as the human desire for happiness, there is also a real longing for divine perfection; in addition to social usefulness, there is also a genuine striving after communion with the deity, and a genuine submission to a higher, holy command; and behind all that rank fantasy growth[s] of affective thought there is an element which cannot be derived from fantasy at all: the knowledge of something which is unconditioned, ultimate, normative, supra-mundane, supra-temporal.”¹

10 recto

Reasons why philosophic explanation *seems* to be insufficient:

- a) the philosopher’s unwillingness *openly* to identify the very core of the Biblical teaching with superstition – hence no real *open* discussion of the *difference* between Bible and other superstition (myth).

- b) Tr. IX. 42 bg., 60 end^{IV}: the extremely rare psychological phenomena as alien as possible to the typical experiences of the philosopher – hence imperfect description of the phenomena by the philosopher.

Now as regards the philosophic interpretation – the philosopher would admit the essential difference between Bible and myth: the Bible presupposes, just as philosophy itself, the realization of the *problem* of myth^V: myth – philosophy / myth – revelation.

Myth and revelation belong together: not predominance of the critical-sceptical spirit.

Myth and philosophy belong together: not predominance of morality.

The starting-point of philosophic explanation³² of *revelation* would therefore be the fact that the foundation of belief in revelation is the belief in the central importance of *moral-ity*.

(Brunner 424³³: according to the NT, “this despairing knowledge of distress and need, that is, the awareness of sin,” comes from the law which only makes demands. The law in question “*belongs absolutely to that which man can tell himself*” – i.e. it is meant to be accessible to man as man.

333: “it is a fact to which the Scripture[s] and the best teachers of the Church bear witness with one voice: that *man as man knows the law of God* . . . indeed that this knowledge of the law is the *center of [the] natural human existence* and the natural self-understanding of man.”)

The task of the philosopher is to understand how the original (mythical) idea of the θεῖος νόμος is modified by the radical understanding of the moral implication and thus transformed into the idea of revelation.

IV [Benedictus Spinoza: *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, IX, ed. Bruder § 42 beginning, § 60 end: “Nescio quid superstitio suadere potuit, et forte inde factum est, quia utramque lectionem aequae bonam seu tolerabilem aestimabant, ideoque, ne earum aliqua negligenteretur, unam scribendam et aliam legendam voverunt.” “ . . . neque enim scire teneor, quae religio ipsos moverit, ut id non facerent.”]

V σμῆλον: the “historical” character of large parts of the Bible – cf. the insistence of *truth* in Greek ἱστορίη ≠ myths, poetry.

- 1) Need of man → society, or else sociability was irreducible: need for *law*.
- 2) [need] for *good law*: original criterion for goodness: ancestral.
Rational basis: a) tested things, b) concern with stability.
- 3) the law depends on the ancestors = the *father* or fathers, *the* source of one's being, loving (beneficent) and demanding obedience (cf. Fustel de Coulanges).
- 4) absolute superiority of the ancestors: superhuman³⁴ beings, *divine* beings – *divine law*: the first things, | the sources of our being are *gods*.
- 5) contradiction between various divine laws: only *one* divine law.
- 6) *full* obedience to the law: the law must be the source of *all* blessings → the god must be *omnipotent* → there can be only *one* God – Maker, Creator ≠ Generator.
- 7) *full* obedience to the law: obedience not merely a duty to be fulfilled in order to get something *else* as reward: full obedience is *love* of the one God with all one's heart, all one's soul and all one's power.
- 8) *full* obedience to the law: no human relation is left to irresponsible arbitrariness → love of *all* men. God is the father of all men, and all men are brothers. בצלם אלהים [in the image of God – Gen. 1,27].
- 9) *full* obedience to the law: not only external actions, but the right *intention*: purity of the heart (loving God with *all* one's heart) – impossibility for man of achieving this: *sin*: need for *mercy*: the loving God forgiving sin more important than God as Judge.
- 10) full obedience to the law: rejection of ὑβρις, self-assertion in *any* sense: critique of cities, arts, kings – *especially* of science which is *the* vehicle of human self-assertion. A unique final revelation which has taken place in the past is *the* correlative of absolute obedience, absolute surrender.
No science: no universals – goodness a derivative from a *particular, individual* phenomenon (goodness = being Christian, Jew . . .). *The* guidance is not knowledge of universals, but the record of the deeds of the mysterious God.

- 11) full obedience to the law: the *required* law must be the *gift* of God: *God* must purify our heart, if our heart is to be pure – *God* must open our lips if our mouth is to proclaim His praise. God must communicate *Himself* to man → He must come *close* to him: Incarnation.^{VI} |

Objections:

11 recto

a) The problem of the presence, the call – not characteristic of the *Bible*. The presence of Asclepius e.g. – what was it? Hallucination – Cf. also C. F. [Meyer],^{VII} Heidegger: God is death.

b) the explanation cannot account for the *fact* of real love of God and neighbour – but it is a *question* whether these are *facts*, and not *interpretations* of facts – what has to be explained, is merely the *demand* for such love.

c) the explanation is based on the Bible of theologians – it *utilizes* them → it *presupposes* them: if the explanation were valid, philosophers should have been able to devise the whole claim independently of the Bible, – i.e., for all practical purposes, in classical antiquity. But: why should philosophers who were going to the opposite direction as the Biblical teachers have been *capable* of discovering what only an entirely different human type bent on the anti-philosophic possibility *could* discover or invent?

VI [Strauss grouped points 5 and 6 with a brace. He either wanted to stress thereby that they belong together or he intended to reduce the eleven steps of his genealogy to ten.]

VII [The reference in the Ms. "Cf. also C. F., Heidegger: God is death," which is rendered obscure by an obvious omission, is to a parallel between Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's novella *Die Versuchung des Pescara* and the significance that Heidegger accords death: In chapters 3 and 4 of the novella, Pescara calls death his divinity. In this connection, consider Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion" (1965) in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), n. 23.]

Notes on Philosophy and Revelation

N 1 recto *The Biblical argument.*

1) *Two* considerations guiding Biblical account of creation: God giving *names* to things, *and* his *seeing* that things created by him are *good*. In the light of these considerations → depreciation of heaven and heavenly bodies → Bible opposes the admiring contemplation of heaven – Babylon seat of astronomy: *tower* of Babel – philosophy.

2) Only things not explicitly called good in Genesis 1 are: heaven and *man*. Connection between problematic goodness of heaven and of man: heaven *tempts* man. Why and how? Question answered by Gen. 2, 3 (story of the fall).

3) Prohibition against eating of “knowledge” = depreciation of heaven → rejection of philosophy

Man created to live in child-like *obedience*, in *blind* obedience: *without* knowledge of good and evil. To devote himself to the *earth*, to his *life* on earth (\neq heaven): man *names*, *rules* only earthly things. Knowledge of good, evil = knowledge *simply* (God’s knowledge of the completed work = knowledge of its being *good*). Eating of “knowledge” = irreconcilable with eating of “life”: not naturally, but because God has *willed* it so. For *this* reason, man has to be *forcibly* prevented from eating of “life” after eating of “knowledge” (expulsion from garden).

4) *How* did man fall? Account of fall explains under what conditions could there be human knowledge of good and evil, and why that condition is impossible of fulfillment.

Eve, not Adam, tempted at once (she adds “touching” to “eating” – more stringent than God). But decisive: intervention of *serpent*.

Serpent says the *truth* – allegedly it contradicts God's word: you will *not* die . . . Why is the serpent right? By virtue of *reasoning*: for God knows that on the *day* you eat thereof you will be like Gods . . . God *cannot* kill you, because he *knows* – his *knowledge* limits his power – his knowledge of something *independent* of his will → μοῖρα (Deum fato subicere), ideas, ἀνάγκη, φυσίς.

The fact that serpent is *right*³⁵ shows that there is something to it – but the sequel (the expulsion) shows that the serpent is *decisively* wrong: something³⁶ *unexpected* happens. |

True statement of serpent is *decisively* wrong, because the *reason* on which it is based, is wrong: limitation of God's power is proved by the limited character of *manifestations* of God's power. Serpent is blind to the *hidden, reserved* power of God. Serpentine principle is: denial of divine omnipotence. N 1 verso

5) That *this* is decisive point, is shown by *punishment* of serpent. Although unexpected: ¹serpent was created *good* – its *slyness* is good,¹ serpent was not *forbidden* to tempt Eve – its punishment a clear case of poena, crimen sine lege – serpent tacitly identifies God's law with his *promulgated* law – and it is *punished* for it. Just as God's *works* do not reveal God's full¹ power, his³⁷ revealed word does not reveal his full *will*.

Connection with Genesis 1: The serpentine conclusion from the *regularity* of heavenly movements etc. to their *intrinsic necessities*.

6) Ascription of the attitude which fully developed is that of philosophy or science, to the *serpent*.

Brutish: man's dignity or nobility consists, not in his knowledge-begotten freedom, but in the simplicity of his obedience. ¹Also: *woman*.¹ This is not to deny that it is a *real* serpent.

7) Self-assurance of serpent based on blindness to God's unpromulgated law. On the other hand, radical obedience → *divination* of God's unpromulgated law. Abraham's bargains with God for the salvation of ³⁸the few just³⁸ in the condemned cities. (Contrast with Cain – guardian of his brother – and Noa[h]'s indifference to victims of deluge). – Abraham's action is a *climax*. ¹More important than עקדה [the binding of Isaac – Gen. 22,9] which is maximum obedience to *revealed* law.¹

8) Story of fall, especially punishment of serpent → man cannot know what God will do – *This* is the meaning of “I shall be that I shall be” (= I shall be gracious to whom I shall be gracious). *Hidden* God – “the Lord hath said that he would dwell in the³⁹ thick darkness.” Man cannot know what God *is* (he cannot *see* God): if he could know what God *is*, he would know what God *will be*. God will be all he will be, and not what he *is*, i.e. *known* to be, *now*. What man can know of God, he owes to God – to his free revelation – freedom or *grace* → particular revelation, ¹*contingent* revelation (≠ eternal revelation)¹ → *particular* law is *the* divine law, *the* absolute law.

9) Story of fall not last word of Bible about knowledge. General principle of Bible: things rebelliously devised by man, are finally accepted by God, ¹transformed into vehicles of grace¹ (city, agriculture, arts, kingship . . .). The same applies to *knowledge*. God *gives* knowledge: his law, becomes⁴⁰ the tree of knowledge which is the tree of life for all those who cling to it. After the fall, man can no longer live in uninstructed obedience. He needs now wisdom, understanding: but not philosophy, but divine revelation. |

N 2 recto

10) *Final conclusion*: Bible grants to philosophers that they would be right if there were no God who can and does reveal himself. Only philosophy, not art, morality etc. etc., is *the* alternative to revelation: human guidance or divine guidance. Tertium non datur. If God had not forbidden it, eating of tree of knowledge = ὁμοιωσις θεῷ would be *the* highest human possibility. Myth of *Politikos*: if there is no divine guidance, *human* guidance is *the* one thing needful. Philosophy and Bible agree as to this: *the* alternatives are¹ philosophy or divine revelation.

Philosopher's answer to Biblical argument.

Philosophers would not be impressed by it: reminded of pagan stories of envious gods – since God would not be envious, he would not forbid man to become like him by understanding good and evil.

Biblical⁴¹ insistence on man's *faith*, on *trust*, in God would be ridiculed as implying a gentleman's view of the first cause: every gentleman is offended if one does not believe him or his word (Cyrop. VII 2, 15–17) – a⁴² wise being⁴³ would not be

offended by doubt, but would *encourage* doubt of everything not evident.

Above all: νόμος and μῦθος. Bible¹ in some respects better, in some worse than other νομοί and μῦθοι.

The inevitable alternative: philosophy or revelation.

1) Alternative cannot be avoided by ascribing to philosophy and revelation different spheres or planes – for: they make assertions about the *same* subject: about the world and human life. (Cf. the controversies about Darwinism, biblical criticism etc.: conflict is, not only possible, but actual.)

2) Alternative not contradicted by fact of harmonizations which abound throughout Western history. For: ¹fact is *attempt* at harmonization, not harmonization *itself*.¹ In every harmonization one is sacrificed, subtly, but surely, to the other.

¹*Philosopher accepts revelation*.¹ If there is revelation, faith is infinitely more important than philosophy – philosophy ceases to be *the* way of life – by accepting revelation, the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher – *if* he does not transform revelation into philosophy (Hegel) and thus sacrifice revelation to philosophy.

¹*Theologian accepts philosophy*¹ – can do it, if he believes that philosophy is *permitted*, that it is justified on the *basis* of revelation. Philosophy thus permitted, thus admitted, is necessarily a humble hand-maid of theology, and not *the* queen of the sciences. |

Nature of alternative allows only of *subordination*, *not* of coordination. *One* demand is right or wrong: for each claims to be *the* one thing needful. N 2 verso

3) *Objection*: does philosophy not imply unbearable dogmatism? does it not imply a *limine* rejection of revelation? of faith? is philosophy not love of truth, and is a *limine* rejection not sign of insincerity? Philosophy is love of truth, i.e. of *evident* truth.

Precisely for this reason, it is of the essence of the philosopher to *suspend* his judgment, and *not* to assent, in all cases in which assent would be based on insufficient evidence.

Whoever is incapable of suspending his judgment in such cases, of *living* in such suspense, whoever fails to know that

doubt is a good pillow for a well-constructed head, cannot be a philosopher.

But *life* requires *decisions* – this is not exact: *action* does – but who said that the life of philosophy is a life of action? The philosophic answer to the pragmatist objection was given by Goethe: der Handelnde ist immer gewissenlos – *quâ* acting man (or as Aristotle says: *quâ* *merely* human beings) we have to accept unevident premises – but this merely shows the inferiority of action.

Transition to the decisive difficulty.

Philosophy could accept revelation only if revelation were an evident, demonstrable fact. For all practical purposes: if revelation could be proved by *historical* evidence.

But revelation cannot be proved by historical evidence.

Coincidence of the teaching of the Reformers with modern historical criticism.

Modern historical criticism has not refuted belief in revelation – but it has refuted historical *argument* allegedly proving the fact of revelation. But this it has really done. |

N 3 recto ***Revelation cannot refute philosophy.***

A large number of arguments – I shall mention here only the most popular ones.

Political argument: *social* need of revelation > stable order; inability of philosophy to establish moral standards (Socrates cannot refute Callicles etc.) –

Proves *at best* necessity of *myth* of revelation (noble lie).

⁴⁴ *Misery of man without God*: but – Socrates (consolation, not *M[isery]* due to envy, limited to Epicurus, Stoics).⁴⁴

Moral argument: inferiority of philosophic morality as compared with Biblical morality (its eudemonism; *placere sibi ipsi* ≠ *placere Deo*; self-assertion vs. self-denial – to love God with all one's heart vs. to love with all one's heart the perfection of one's understanding).

Yet: the criterion *itself* can be questioned – viz. the *radical* moral demand, the insistence on absolute purity of intentions.

All arguments of faith against philosophy *presuppose* faith: they are circular.

Revelation has no support other than revelation: the only book written in defense of the Bible is the Bible itself (Lessing)

¹ Or: Newman's "I know, I know."¹

Since revelation has no support outside itself, since its arguments are circular, philosophy can disregard revelation.

Philosophy cannot refute revelation.

Again limited to most popular aspects. Fundamental difference between: refutation of *adherents* of revelation (= human beings) and refutation of revelation (= God) – cf. Calvin: *se nobiscum litigare fingunt*.

The famous refutation of Genesis 1 by modern geology – the *wrong* answer is: the Bible is not a scientific book, but concerned only with matters of faith and manners – for: faith and science overlap, e.g. in the question of miracles – if the Bible is not to be taken seriously in matters concerning physical world and events in it, may be the Biblical reports go back to people incapable of exact observation etc.⁴⁵ The good and decisive answer is this: all scientific arguments against the Biblical account of creation etc. *presuppose* the impossibility of miracles (events which according to science must have required billions of years, are miraculously possible in a split second) – i.e. they beg the question.

Or: Biblical criticism – the arguments *presuppose* the impossibility of verbal inspiration: it was impossible for *Moses* to describe⁴⁶ events occurring centuries after his death, but not for God to inspire to him the truth etc.

The multiplicity of revelations – they refute each other – a particularly shallow argument: for!

1) if *una est religio in rituum varietate*, if every revealed religion is a *human* interpretation of the call of God, the variety of human interpretations does not do away with the fact that a personal God freely and mysteriously calls men to Himself. It is true, this would presuppose an attitude of radical *tolerance*. But this is not even necessary; for:

2) scandals *must* come, heresies *must* come – it is of the essence of revelation to be constantly challenged by pseudo-revelations, heresies etc.

N 3 verso

Why revelation cannot refute philosophy, and vice versa.

Generally:

a) human knowledge is always so limited that the *possibility* of revelation cannot be refuted⁴⁷, and *need* for revelation cannot be denied.

b) revelation is always so uncertain that it can be rejected, and man is so constructed that he can find his satisfaction, his happiness, in investigation, in the progress of clarity.

Conclusions to be drawn from this state of affairs.

First suggestion – neutrality is superior to the alternatives –
neutrality means:

a) our thesis can be proved to both, whereas neither of the 2 opposed theses⁴⁸ – right of revelation and right of philosophy – can be proved to the other.

b) attempt to *understand*, to do *justice* to both positions.

Deplorable state of mutual appreciation. Believers are rightly shocked by what philosophers say, or intimate, regarding revelation, and philosophers can only shrug their shoulders about what believers say about philosophy.

(Cf. Spinoza on Bible; Pascal on Epicureans – Stoics; Nietzsche on Bible as resentment; Kierkegaard on Socrates as distinguished from Plato. As regards Thomas, a *problem* is shown by Luther's dissatisfaction with scholastic theology.)

One could say that the very fact that each side has tried to refute the other, reveals⁴⁹ a⁵⁰ deep misunderstanding.

But: neutrality is a *philosophic* attitude > victory of philosophy.

The very insight into the *limitations* of philosophy is a victory of philosophy: because it is an *insight*. |

N 4 recto

Yet:

Second suggestion: Problematic basis of philosophy is revealed by its inability to refute revelation.

Revelation or faith is *not* compelled, by its principle, to *refute* philosophy. But philosophy is – threatened by the very possibility of revelation which it cannot refute: philosophy cannot leave it at a *defence*; it *must* attack.

Why is philosophy threatened by the very possibility of revelation?

I a. *The* alternative is philosophy or revelation, i.e. what *ultimately* counts is either divine guidance or human guidance; if there is no divine guidance, human guidance is *the* One Thing needful.

The other way round: if there is revelation, philosophy becomes something infinitely unimportant – the *possibility* of revelation implies the *possible meaninglessness* of philosophy. If the possibility of revelation remains an open question, the *significance of philosophy* remains an open question.

Therefore, philosophy stands and falls by the contention that philosophy is the One Thing Needful, or the highest possibility of man. ¹Philosophy cannot claim less: it cannot afford being modest.¹

b. But philosophy cannot refute the possibility of revelation. Hence, philosophy is *not* necessarily the One Thing Needful; hence the choice of philosophy is based, not on evident or rational necessity, but on an unevident, a fundamentally *blind* decision. The claim of philosophy is plausible, but not cogent; it is verisimile, but not verum.

The *claim* of philosophy that it⁵¹ wisely suspends its judgment, whereas faith boldly or rashly decides, is untenable; for philosophy *itself rests* on a decision.

If philosophy cannot justify itself as a rational *necessity*, a life devoted to the quest for evident knowledge rests *itself* on an unevident assumption – but this confirms the thesis of faith that there is no possibility of *consistency*, of a *consistent life* without faith or belief in revelation. |

II. One might suggest this way out: philosophy does not have to prove the *impossibility* of revelation; for the possibility of revelation is so remote, so infinitely remote that it is not a practical proposition.

N 4 verso

This argument is becoming for business-men, but it is a disgrace – I do not say for philosophers – but for anyone who claims ever to have come [with]in hailing distance of philosophy or science.

Philosophy cannot prove that revelation is impossible; hence it cannot prove *more* than that revelation is most *improbable* or radically *uncertain*. But this is so far from being a

refutation of revelation, that it is not even *relevant*: it is the very *boast* of revelation to be a *miracle*, hence most improbable and most uncertain. ¹Philosophy implies the refusal to accept, or to adhere to, whatever is not *evident*; but revelation is per se inevident; ergo philosophy does not *refute* the claim of revelation; it begs the question; it rests on a *dogmatic* assumption. No specific *argument* of philosophy, but simply the philosophic criterion of truth *settles* the issue. Philosophy presupposes *itself*.¹

Philosophy rejects revelation because of its uncertainty – but uncertainty is of the *essence* of revelation – revelation *denies* the philosophic criterion of truth (everything which is incapable of being made manifest, is suspect; αὐτοψία; evident necessity . . .). Philosophy rejects revelation, philosophy asserts its own *necessity*, on the *basis* of the philosophic criterion of truth: the justification of philosophy is *circular* – i.e. it is a scandal.

On the basis of its initial *hypothesis* (that philosophy is the highest possibility of man), philosophy can maintain itself *easily* against the claim of revelation – but it cannot deny that this basic premise is, and is bound to remain, a *hypothesis*.

I conclude: the fact that revelation cannot refute philosophy and vice versa, decides in favor of revelation. Or: the impossibility of neutrality between revelation and philosophy decides in favor of revelation.

¹(Consider this: revelation cannot be proved – but philosophy can be proved: it can be proved that man does philosophize: the *fact* of philosophy can be proved, whereas the fact of revelation cannot.)¹ |

N 5 recto

Consequence for philosophy: appears if we restate the problem as follows: Philosophy is the highest possibility of man, if there is no revelation; but there is no revelation, because there can never be evident *knowledge* of the fact of revelation. The argument presupposes the tacit identification of “being” with “evidently knowable.” Philosophy is essentially “idealistic” (Laberthonnière, L’idéalisme grec et le réalisme chrétien^{VIII}).

VIII [The title that Strauss cites from memory reads: Lucien Laberthonnière, *Le réalisme chrétien et l’idéalisme grec* (Paris 1904) – cf. letter to Gerhard Krüger from March 14, 1933, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, p. 427.]

It is *this* fact which gave rise to Kant's Critique of pure reason, to his distinction between the phenomenon and the Thing-in-itself: Kant's "idealism" is an *attack* on the "idealism" of classical philosophy.¹ But cf. Plato on ἀσθένεια τοῦ λόγου.¹

A philosophy which believes that it can refute the possibility of revelation – and a philosophy which does not believe that: *this* is the real meaning of la querelle des anciens et des modernes.

The consequence for philosophy: radical revision of fundamental reflections of classical philosophy (man = animal rationale – his perfection = philosophy etc.) along the lines of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.

***Third suggestion*⁵² – the Greek philosopher would answer along these lines –**

Philosophy does not need revelation, but revelation needs philosophy: philosophy refuses to be called before tribunal of revelation, but revelation *must* recognize the tribunal of philosophy. For adherents of revelation may *say* credo quia absurdum, they cannot *mean* it; they can be forced to admit that the objects of faith must be *possible* – but the elaboration of what is possible or not, is the sake of *philosophy*.^{IX}

But the cognizance of philosophy is not limited to *possible* things, for there is human knowledge of actual things. Since both philosophy and faith make assertions about *actual* things, there is a possibility of *conflict* and of *refutation* of one by the other.¹ Faith as faith *must* make assertions which can be *checked* by unbelievers – it *must* be based at⁵³ *some* point on alleged or real *knowledge* – but that "knowledge" is *necessarily* only *alleged* knowledge, owing to the *basic* fallacy, of faith, the attribution of *absolute* importance to *morality* (the pure heart).¹

To *exclude* the possibility of refutation radically, there is only one way: that faith has no basis whatever in human knowledge of actual things. This view of faith is not the Jewish and the Catholic one. It was prepared by the Reformers and reaches its climax in Kierkegaard. Whereas the Reformation stands and

IX [The English phrase "is the sake of philosophy" is explained and is to be understood as a rendering of the German "ist Sache der Philosophie" (is the task or subject matter of philosophy).]

N 5 verso

falls by the absolute truth of the Bible, i.e. of a book which is subject to various kinds of human investigations, *Kierkegaard* took away this last link between the realm of actual knowledge and the realm of faith. | He says (*Philosophical Fragments* 87): for faith it would have been more than enough if the generation contemporary with Jesus had⁵⁴ left nothing behind than these words: "We have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died." If we disregard the difficulty that one would have to *know* that "this little advertisement" *really* goes back to the contemporaries of Jesus, can faith on *such* a basis be defended against the objection that "assentire his quae sunt fidei, est levitatis" (S.c.G. I 6)? And if this is so, must we not admit the possibility of refutation of one by the other and hence start the discussion all over again? or rather, *begin* the discussion by taking up the *concrete* problems to which I could barely allude tonight?⁵⁵

In conclusion, I would like to name⁵⁶ that man to whom I owe, so to say, everything I have been able to discern in the labyrinth of that grave question: Lessing. I do not mean the Lessing of a certain tradition, the Lessing celebrated by a certain type of oratory, but the true and unknown Lessing. Lessing's attitude was characterized by an innate disgust against compromises in serious, i.e. theoretical, matters: he rejected Socinianism, enlightened Christianity (of which one does not know where it is Christian and where it is enlightened) and deism, and he would have rejected German idealism as well (as Jacobi vs. Schelling shows). He admitted only¹ this alternative: orthodoxy (in his case Lutheran, of course) or Spinoza (i.e. philosophy, for there is no philosophy other than that of Spinoza). He decided in favor of philosophy. – Why he took this step, he has indicated in more than one passage of his writings – but in none, I think, more clearly than in this (*Antiqu. Briefe* 45 end) with which he concludes his discussion of the different treatment of ¹perspective in ancient and in modern painting¹:

"We see more than the ancients; and yet our eyes might possibly be poorer than the eyes of the ancients; the ancients saw less than we; but their eyes might have been more⁵⁷

discerning than ours. – I fear that the whole comparison of the ancients and the moderns would lead to this result.”

¹Possibility of refutation of revelation implied in Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy. What their specific argument is, we cannot say before we have understood their whole teaching. Since I cannot claim to have achieved this, I must leave the issue open.¹

Text-Critical Notes

[] contains additions by the editor.

<> indicates deletions by Leo Strauss.

1. Inserted or added by Leo Strauss between the lines or in the margins.
2. < are >
3. < he >
4. < can >
5. < demonstration >
6. Ms.: preying
7. < According to its original me[aning] > The
8. [The title and the beginning of point 5 first read as follows and then were immediately discarded by LS:] < 5) *Philosophy must assert that revelation is impossible*. Philosophy asserts that the one thing needful is philosophizing. This assertion is contradicted by the teaching of revelation. The philosopher must therefore *refute* the teaching of revelation. More than that: he must prove the *impossibility* of revelation. For if revelation is *possible*, it is possible that the philosophic enterprise is fundamentally wrong. >
9. < subtle >
10. < prove >
11. < implies >
12. his < literary > < textual >¹
13. < divorced >
14. < Also, > a God
15. as < the cause of all things the fully¹ intelligible >
16. us. < They would say the thing >
17. < it >
18. < can >
19. limit < creati >
20. < creation as >
21. in < God >
22. < less than most other theologians >
23. < admits >
24. and < that >
25. < whether >

26. say < in this case >
27. < My contention is th >
28. < will >
29. < (Theaet. in pri >
30. more < than >
31. < *refute* >
32. explanation < would therefore be >
33. Ms.: 423
34. < divine >
35. *right* < that >
36. < the >
37. his < word is >
38. < the just >
39. the < dark >
40. < the tree > becomes
41. < It would be ridiculed as gentleman's view > [Then in a new line:] Biblical
42. < Bible seems to apply this to God. > – a
43. < man >
44. [Inserted between the lines in pencil. The first four words in the brackets are especially difficult to decipher, particularly as *M.* looks to be only an abbreviation. The commas after *consolation* and *envy* have been added by the editor so as to allow the thought, which Strauss noted for himself in an extremely condensed form, to become more comprehensible.]
45. etc. ¹ < Applied to > ¹
46. describe < this to >
47. < denied, and >
48. Ms.: thesis
49. < shows >
50. < that >
51. it < suspends >
52. [In the Ms. *Third suggestion* is underlined, unlike in the case of *First suggestion* and *Second suggestion* previously, not once, but twice, and thus is given special emphasis.]
53. Ms.: on
54. had < nothing >
55. [Noted in this connection in the lower margin and then crossed out:] < Die kleinen Zettel a) und b). > [= Small slips of paper a) and b).]
56. < mention >
57. < better >